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Sponsorship of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games: An Empirical Examination of the Reactions to Local Sponsors and Rival Brands

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Abstract

This study examines awareness, congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of three local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and their strongest rival brands, and tests the relationships among congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of both actual sponsors and their rivals. Data were collected through an online questionnaire (n = 621). Results indicated that awareness was significantly higher for only one of the sponsors. Neither congruence nor attitude toward the brand were higher for local sponsors when compared to their rival brands. Purchase intentions were significantly lower for local sponsors. Attitude toward the brand was significantly related to purchase intentions for all local sponsors and their rival brands. These findings suggest the need for local sponsors to engage in leveraging activities and to partner with the host to explain their role in the event's success. This study also draws attention to the importance for brands to carefully select the events to invest.

Keywords: local sponsors, rival brands, sponsorship effectiveness, sport events, Olympic Games

Sponsorship of sports has become a dominant component of marketing investments, and sport mega-events such as the Olympic Games often represent important sponsorship vehicles used by firms aiming to communicate with mass audiences. For example, the 2016 Rio Olympic Games inspired 187 million tweets, generated 75 billion total impressions on Twitter, and led 277 million people to have 1.5 billion interactions on Facebook (Hutchinson, 2016). Based on this extensive popularity of sport mega-events, many firms have invested in sponsorship deals with the hope of distinguishing themselves from competitors and obtaining competitive advantages (Biscaia, Correia, Ross, Rosado, & Marôco, 2013; Chanavat & Desbordes, 2014).

Cornwell (1995) defines sponsorship-linked marketing as "the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship" (p. 15). There are several benefits that sponsors may pursue when establishing sponsorship deals with sport organizations, with the awareness of a sponsor being one of the most important aspects when engaging in a sponsorship deal (Nufer & Bühler, 2010; Pitts & Slattery, 2004). Recent studies have suggested that perceived congruence (or fit) between the sponsor and the sponsored entity (sponsee) contributes to increased sponsorship awareness (Trendel & Warlop, 2014). Complementarily, it is commonly accepted that increased awareness represents an initial step or a prerequisite for a sponsor to obtain a set of potential subsequent benefits, such as increased attitudes towards the sponsor and purchase intentions of its

products and services (Crompton, 2004; Madrigal, 2001; Nadeau, O'Reilly, Cakmak, Heslop, & Verwey, 2016).

When a firm invests in sponsoring a sport mega-event, it embarks on a journey aiming to establish itself as the uncontested brand in its category; yet, at the same time, it may be exposed to many counter-attacks by competitors, which have chosen not to exploit the sponsorship opportunity—either by lack of resources or by strategic decision (Pitt, Parent, Berthon, & Steyn, 2010). The Olympic Games attract high interest and intense competition from corporations wishing to benefit from this global event (MacIntosh et al., 2012), and prospect consumers may have a natural difficulty in recognizing the actual sponsors when they are exposed to multiple brands (Biscaia, Correia, Ross & Rosado, 2014). In this sense, the examination of sponsorship awareness is paramount for both sponsor and sponsee as the consumers' memory of the brand is vital to increasing brand equity and influencing their subsequent reactions (Keller, 1993; Crompton, 2014). However, while there are some studies focusing on the consumers' ability to correctly identify the global sponsors of sport mega-events (Abeza, Pegoraro, Naraine, Séguin, & O'Reilly, 2012), little is known on whether consumers identify the local sponsors of the Olympic Games and if they have different perceptions of congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions regarding sponsoring brands and non-sponsoring brands.

Wakefield and Bennett (2010) noted that there is a disparity between consumer reactions to prominent and less prominent sponsors of mega-events, because market prominence acts as a source of information when inferring about event sponsors (Pham & Johar, 2001). This suggests that consumers' responses to global and local sponsors might be different because these brands have different marketing power and prominence. Based on the prominence heuristic (Pham & Johar, 2001), a global brand such as Coca-Cola should benefit from enhanced image when it is accurately identified as an Olympic sponsor, while less prominent brands (i.e., local sponsors) may face more difficulties being identified as event sponsors. Different chances of being accurately identified as a sponsor may then affect subsequent outcomes, such as perceived congruence, attitudes towards the sponsor, or purchase intensions (Crompton, 2004). Moreover, the association of local and global sponsors with the Olympic Games has different timing, intensity, and strength. Global sponsors have invested millions in fees and leveraging strategies throughout decades to be associated with the Olympics, and this strategy has been suggested to be beneficial (MacIntosh et al., 2012). In turn, local brands have invested much smaller amounts for a period of four years only, and its effectiveness is yet to be investigated. Even when investing less than global brands and for a shorter period of time, local brands still invest relatively large amounts of money and effort expecting to collect benefits from association with the Olympics (ISPO, 2016). Thus, examining the reactions to actual local sponsors and their rival brands may provide new useful insights for improvements in future Olympic sponsorship deals. Based on previous literature and associated gaps, this study was designed to accomplish two main purposes: (1) to describe the awareness, congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of actual local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and their rival brands and (2) to test the relationships among congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of both local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and their rival brands.

Literature Review

Sponsorship and the Olympics

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has basically two sponsorship strategies. The first one is the well-known The Olympic Partner (TOP) Program, which represents long-term partnerships between the IOC and multinational organizations, such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Visa (IOC, 2016a). The TOP sponsorships account for more than 40% of the IOC's revenues and are vital for the maintenance of the Olympic movement (IOC, 2016b). The second strategy is called the Local Sponsorship Program. This strategy is managed by active Organizing Committees for Olympic Games (OCOGs) and has a limited duration of four years, the Olympiad period (IOC, 2016b). The association of local and global sponsors with the Olympic Games has different timing, intensity, and strength. For example, Coca-Cola has been a partner of the IOC since 1928. Beyond timing, Coca-Cola has developed numerous leveraging strategies to associate with the Olympic Games (IOC, 2016a) including parallel events (e.g., the torch relay) and special products (e.g., Coke special cans with the Olympic rings) to intensify the association as an Olympic Partner. The intensity and long-term association create a much stronger relationship between the Olympic Games and TOP sponsors when compared to temporary, local sponsors. Despite the differences, organizing committees have relied on local sponsorship fees, which are usually a very important source of financial resources, to prepare for and stage the Olympic Games. To this respect, the Olympic Marketing Fact File 2017 shows that the local sponsor program generated more than

US$ 2 billion to the OCOGs during the 2013–2016 quadrennium (IOC, 2016b).

Previous studies have investigated the efficacy of strategies adopted by TOP sponsors (Abeza et al., 2012; Burton, 2013; Chanavat & Desbordes, 2014). Burton (2013) described the success of TOP sponsors over the years because of their association with the Olympics, while Abeza et al. (2012) indicated that TOP sponsors have been effective at improving awareness, brand image, and reputation of their products. While previous studies have focused on TOP sponsors, so far, the effectiveness of the partnership between local sponsors and the Olympic Games has not been investigated. As noted by Roy and Cornwell (2004), consumer responses to sponsors may differ due to the different knowledge structures they possess. Also, the way individuals react to a sponsor is often influenced by market prominence of the brand and relatedness to the event (Biscaia, Trail, Ross, & Yoshida, 2017; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). Considering that TOP sponsors tend to have stronger brands, more visibility on media, and a longer partnership with the event than local sponsors, the latter should be interested to know if they can reach the same level of success as the former in terms of awareness, congruence, attitudes toward their brands, and purchase intentions. In addition, it is important to consider that persuasion strategies from local sponsors are initiated before the competitions start (i.e., Olympiad period), and consumers tend to experience anticipatory excitement around the event (Armenakyan, O'Reilly, Heslop, Nadeau, & Lu, 2016). Thus, it is vital to understand if local sponsors obtain the same benefits as global sponsors in such a cluttered market environment with intense competition from other corporations wishing to create direct or indirect associations with the event (MacIntosh et al., 2012). To fill this gap in the literature, the current research focused on a group of local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. In practical terms, describing consumers' reactions toward the local sponsors' brands represent an important step towards exploring the deeper partnership between the Olympic Games and local brands. Through the simultaneous analysis of both local sponsors and rival brands with no formal link to the event, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how to promote stronger partnerships between local sponsors and hosting entities of sport mega-events.

Sponsorship Awareness

As sponsors strive to become salient among consumers through an association with the sport property (Biscaia et al., 2014; Nadeau et al., 2016), sponsorship awareness is generally accepted as an important mechanism for determining the effectiveness of a sponsorship deal (Nufer & Bühler, 2010). The awareness of a sponsor indicates the extent to which a target audience recalls and recognizes the association of a brand (i.e., sponsor) with a sport property (Crompton, 2014). Following Aaker (1996), sponsorship recall refers to the consumer's ability to retrieve from memory the sponsor's name without any mention to other brands or any product category, while sponsorship recognition relates to the consumer's ability to remember past exposure to a sponsor when given a list of several brands as a cue.

A significant amount of research has focused on the examination of sponsorship awareness (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2014; Lardinoix & Derbaix, 2001). The ability to identify sponsors has been frequently associated with consumers' favorable perceptions of the sponsor-event congruence (Trendel & Warlop, 2014). The associative network model provides support for this notion by stipulating that brands tend to be encoded in memory and recalled more effectively when sharing associations with the event (Cornwell, Humphreys, Maguire, Weeks, & Tellegen, 2006). Seeing a sponsor's name associated with a team or event on a regular basis may also reinforce the product-sport relationship in consumers' mind (Yang, Sparks, & Li, 2008). The exposure and awareness of a sponsor may also contribute to improving consumers' perceptions of the sponsor-event congruence.

Previous studies have highlighted that creating consumer awareness of the sponsor's brand is vital when engaging in a sponsorship deal (Nufer & Bühler, 2010). The rationale for this assumption is that if awareness is not achieved, sponsors will face more difficulties in meeting other subsequent objectives, such as positive attitudes towards the sponsors and positive behavioral intentions (Biscaia et al., 2013; Crompton, 2004; Ko, Kim, Claussen, & Kim, 2008). The ability to correctly identify a sponsor in a cluttered market environment such as the Olympic Games may prove not to be an easy task for consumers (MacIntosh et al., 2012), as the presence of competitor brands may cause memory interference and reduce recall for true sponsors (Cornwell et al., 2006). This may be particularly challenging for brands with less market prominence (Pham & Johar, 2001) and marketing power, such as local sponsors. However, no attention has been devoted to the examination of local sponsors' awareness, which may limit the understanding of the effectiveness of these partnerships in the Olympic Games. If a brand that is not sponsoring the event is incorrectly identified as a sponsor, it means this brand may obtain the benefits that would be linked to an actual sponsor. Therefore, a

solid awareness of a local sponsor is crucial to increase brand equity and to avoid rival brands devaluing actual sponsors (O´Reilly, Nadeau, Séguin, & Harrison, 2007).

Congruence between the Sponsor and the Event

The concept of congruence (also referred to as fit in the sponsorship literature) refers to a strategic match between a sponsor and a sponsee (Zdravkovic, Magnusson, & Stanley, 2010). Pappu and Cornwell (2014) mentioned that perceptions of congruence can emanate from numerous features, while Crompton (2014) highlighted that three distinct types of congruence may exist: direct functional congruence (i.e., when the sponsoring brand can be used directly in the event); indirect functional congruence (i.e., when there is a logical functional link between the use of a product and the event, but the product is not crucial to ensure the event takes place); and image based congruence (i.e., a natural relationship between the sponsoring brand and the event's image). Still, no matter the type of sponsor-sponsee relationship, it is widely accepted that the congruence between a sponsor and a sport event is of paramount importance to increasing sponsorship success (Kim, Lee, Magnunsen, & Kim, 2015) given that storage in memory and retrieval of information are influenced by relatedness or similarity (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005).

Previous studies have suggested that good perceptions of congruence between the sponsor and the event are important to improve consumers' attitude towards the sponsors (e.g., Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Speed & Thompson, 2000). That is, if individuals have a good opinion about the event and perceive the sponsor and event to be somehow related, they are likely to demonstrate a positive attitude towards the sponsor (Dees, Bennett, & Ferreira, 2010). Complementarily, perceived congruence between the sponsor and the event has been referred to as a predictor of consumers' intentions to purchase the sponsors' products (Kim et al., 2015). The underlying rationale for these studies is the assumption that sponsor-event congruence minimizes consumers' skepticism about sponsors' motives and facilitates the acceptance of the sponsorship (Rifon, Choi, Trimble, & Li, 2004). This is particularly suitable for long-term partnerships (e.g., TOP program) given that consumers tend to make positive inferences about congruence and sponsor motives in a long-term partnership (Woisetschläger, Backhaus, & Cornwell, 2017). Also, the sponsor-event congruence may be facilitated by the prominence of the sponsoring brand due to its easier access in consumers' memory (Biscaia et al., 2017; Pham & Johar, 2001), such as for global sponsors. Following these assumptions, and due to the lack of investigations on the effectiveness of local sponsors of the Olympics (e.g., short-term partnership and less prominence), understanding if local sponsors are perceived to be congruent with this sport-mega event and how perceived congruence impacts attitudes and purchase intentions of these sponsoring brands in a cluttered sponsorship environment, such as the Olympic Games, assumes great importance.

Attitude towards the Sponsor

The development of a positive attitude towards the sponsor has been suggested as a key variable for sponsorship effectiveness due to its impact on future consumer behaviors (Biscaia et al., 2014; Madrigal, 2001). According to Eagly and Chaiken (1998), an attitude refers to a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p. 1). In sponsorship research, an attitude towards a sponsor represents the consumer's overall evaluation of the brand sponsoring the event (Keller, 2003), and consumers often develop positive attitudes towards the sponsor if they believe the sponsorship is beneficial for the sport property (Cornwell et al., 2005).

Following the attitude-behavior framework (Fazio, Powell, & Herr, 1983), favorable attitudes toward sponsors are often expected to positively affect consumption of a sponsor's products. This theoretical assumption has been empirically tested in numerous studies conducted within the sport sponsorship domain. For example, Biscaia et al. (2013) noted that attitude towards the sponsor was the strongest predictor of purchase intentions of two sponsors from a professional sport team, while Zaharia, Biscaia, Gray, and Stotlar (2016) have also reported a strong positive relationship between fans' attitudes toward the sponsor and purchase intentions. However, most research using actual sponsors (as opposed to abstract sponsors) is focused on the settings of professional sport where events (i.e., games) are regularly available for consumers, and little is known on the attitude toward specific local sponsors of transient sport mega-events (i.e., not held every year; Nadeau et al., 2016) and how it influences the intention to purchase the associated products. Long-term partnerships often lead to positive reactions toward the sponsor due to the stronger association with the brand-event for consumers (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013; Woisetschläger et al., 2017). However, contrary to global sponsors, local sponsorship programs have a limited duration (IOC, 2016b). Also, as noted by Cornwell et al. (2005), rival competitor brands may "influence the sponsorship mechanics of a true sponsor" (p. 34), and brands with less market prominence may face difficulties being

thought of as event sponsors (Pham & Johar, 2001). To this end, understanding the relationship between attitude towards local sponsors and subsequent purchase intentions in the setting of the Olympic Games is very important, given that this event has a transient nature and captures worldwide attention and competition from numerous brands, while at the same time local sponsors invest substantial money and resources into obtaining the right to be associated with the event.

Purchase Intentions of Sponsor Products

In sponsorship research, a purchase intention is often suggested to be an indicator of a fan's motivation to purchase the sponsor's products or services (Dees, Bennett, & Villegas, 2008). O'Reilly, Lyberger, McCarthy Séguin, and Nadeau (2008) reported that sponsorship of sport mega-events has a strong effect on purchase intentions, while Stotlar (1993) noted that purchase intentions are an important outcome of sponsoring the Olympic Games. Madrigal (2001) further added to this idea by mentioning that actual purchase behaviors are often predicted accurately via a person's intentions. Similarly, Cornwell et al. (2008) indicated that purchase intentions and actual purchases constitute a priority for companies sponsoring events. The underlying rationale for this assumption is provided by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), highlighting that an intention represents an indicator of how much a person is willing to engage in a behavior. While this theoretical assumption has been attested in some previous studies (e.g., Cheng, Chen, Chen, & Lu, 2012), it is also important to note that a purchase intention is not the same as an actual purchase behavior, and that the link between intention and purchase has not always been confirmed in sponsorship studies (e.g., Zaharia et al., 2016). Notwithstanding, behavioral intentions have been used as the final indicator to evaluate sponsorship effectiveness in many studies (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2008), due to the difficulties in collecting data on actual purchase behaviors and because sponsor-related purchase behaviors may depend on a variety of other aspects that may not be related to the sport event (Crompton, 2014). Even though purchase intentions may not be the most perfect sales indicator, it is usually acknowledged as a good measure (MacInstosh et al., 2012). In this sense, consumers' purchase intentions often represent a cornerstone for sport entities to legitimize their relationships with sponsors and to negotiate future deals (Biscaia et al., 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2008).

The presence of rival brands in the sponsorship environment of the Olympic Games may affect consumers' purchase intentions (MacInstosh et al., 2012), and the partnership between local sponsors and hosts is confined to a limited time frame (Nadeau et al., 2016) as opposed to global sponsors. Furthermore, previous studies have suggested that aspects such as market prominence, sponsorship length (McDonald & Karg, 2015), and clutter (Cornwell et al., 2005) play a role in how consumers respond to sponsoring brands, but these assumptions have not been empirically examined within the context of sport mega-events. Thus, the examination of consumers' purchase intentions toward both local sponsors and their rival brands represents a contribution to better understanding the effectiveness of local sponsorship programs with the Olympic Games.

Based on previous literature and remaining gaps, the following research questions are proposed in the current study:

RQ1: Do people correctly recognize the local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games?

RQ2: Do people perceive a higher congruence between the local sponsor brand and the event when compared to a non-sponsor rival brand?

RQ3: Do people have better attitudes toward the local sponsor brand of the event when compared to a non-sponsor rival brand?

RQ4: Do people have higher purchase intentions of the local sponsor brand of the event when compared to a non-sponsor rival brand?

RQ5: Do people's perceptions of brand-event congruence and attitudes toward the brand influence their purchase intentions of local sponsor brands?

RQ6: Do people's perceptions of brand-event congruence and attitudes toward the brand influence their purchase intentions of non-sponsor rival brands?

Method

Participants

Participants of this study were alumni of a large Brazilian university (N = 3,944) and data were collected four months before the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. While a sponsorship strategy often achieves its peak during the actual competition, this period was marked by an intense debate in Brazil about the brands associated or trying to associate with the event (Exame, 2016). Also, the inference theory argues that people make judgments about brands or services based on environmental cues (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002), such as sponsors' stimuli, before the competition starts. Furthermore, people's perceptions of a meaningful environment often conveys information directly to them (Gibson, 1979) and consumers of the Olympic Games experience anticipatory excitement (Armenakyan et al., 2016). Therefore, one might expect

consumers to make judgments about the sponsors even before the event competition starts.

After sending an invitation by email, 363 messages bounced back, diminishing our database by 9.2% (N = 3,581). A total of 621 questionnaires were returned and deemed usable for data analysis (response rate of 17.3%). Although this was a convenience sample, the target population (i.e., people with a college degree in Brazil) is important for studies about consumption of sport and sport-related products, because they have more spare time to spend with spectatorship sport, more discretionary money to spend on non-necessary products (like the ones tested in this research), and tend to be less price sensitive (UOL Educação, 2011). In support of this idea, previous studies have noted that people with college degree represent an important consumer segment of sport mega-events (O'Reilly et al., 2008), and alumni samples have been successfully adopted in prior sport consumption research (Hedlund, 2014). Regarding the demographic characteristics, most of the respondents were female (57.2%), not married (76.1%), and aged 28.1 (*SD* = 5.7) on average.

Procedures

Participants received a link by email that directed them to the online survey website. The option for this methodology was based on the advantages and logistical constraints of online surveys highlighted in prior studies (e.g., Bech & Kristensen, 2009), including higher response rates, reduced overall costs, and improved aesthetic and design capabilities. The survey instrument—self-administered questionnaire—was organized in four sections. The first three sections were related to the three types of products that were investigated: cell phone provider, yogurt, and beer—one section per product. All these products were sold by local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and faced strong market competition. Those three sections started with the same question: "Please, among the four options below, indicate the one you believe is an actual sponsor of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games". The first section listed the four most popular brands of cell phone providers in Brazil: *Claro* (sponsor),and *Vivo, Oi*, and *Tim* (non-sponsors). The second section listed the four most popular brands of yogurts: *Batavo* (sponsor),and *Nestle, Danone,* and *Vigor* (non-sponsors). The third section listed the four most popular brands of beer: *Skol* (sponsor), and *Brahma, Antarctica*, and *Nova Schin* (non-sponsors). The response options (i.e., the brands) for the first question in each of these three sections appeared in a random order for each participant. The fourth section asked demographic questions, such as gender, age, marital status, and education level.

In the three initial sections, we first examined brand awareness using a recognition measure, given that the intention was to compare brands. Following the procedures of previous studies assessing sponsorship recognition (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2014; Lardinoix & Derbaix, 2001), participants were asked to identify which of the four brands was a sponsor of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. After choosing one brand as the sponsor, respondents were directed to the questions related to their perceptions about congruence between the chosen brand and the event, attitudes toward that brand, and purchase intentions of associated products. The items in these three sections were jumbled. The stem for these items was the same and read, "Considering [the chosen brand] as a sponsor of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, please, indicate your level of agreement with the following statements". All items in these sections were measured on a 7-point Likert scale type, ranging from *very strongly disagree* (1) *to very strongly agree* (7). Participants perception of congruence was measured using four items proposed by Speed and Thompson (2000). In the original research, measures of these items showed good construct validity and reliability ($\alpha = 0.95$). Attitudes toward the brand were measured using three items from Biscaia et al. (2013). Investigating different sponsors, these authors found good convergent validity (AVE ranging from 0.85 to 0.91) and good reliability (α ranging from 0.95 to 0.97). Purchase intentions were measured using a single item proposed by Biscaia et al. (2013). Consistent with Söderlund (2006), a single item allows participants to exclusively focus on the intended "doing behavior" of the current research (i.e., purchase intention) and it is also less time-consuming for participants. The use of a single item as an outcome variable may suffice in certain circumstances (e.g., good reliability) and favors market researchers and marketing directors (Kwon & Trail, 2005). Also, this procedure has been successfully adopted in prior research about sport consumption behaviors (Ferrand, Robinson, & Valette-Florence, 2010) and sponsorship effectiveness in sport mega-events (Barros & Silvestre, 2006).

Data Analysis

First, we analyzed a table of frequencies to investigate whether respondents could correctly recognize the actual sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympics in a list with four options. Then, to answer RQ1, we conducted two chi-square tests for each type of product, comparing the expected values by chance against the observed results. In the first test, we compared the actual

sponsor against the three rival brands, considering that the expected result would be 25% for the actual sponsor and 75% for the non-sponsors. In the second test, we compared only the actual sponsor against the strongest non-sponsor (i.e., the rival brand with more incorrect responses as being a sponsor), considering that each one would have an expected value of 50%. This comparison was important to simultaneously focus on the main competitor of each sponsor and ensure the parsimony of the subsequent models. Consistently, for all subsequent RQs, the comparisons were conducted only between the actual sponsor and the strongest non-sponsor brand.

Prior to answer RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, the psychometric properties of the items were assessed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using MPlus 7.11. The fit of the CFA was examined using the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), comparative-of-fit-index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Internal consistency was measured through Cronbach's alpha (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). Convergent validity was evaluated through the average variance extracted (AVE), while discriminant validity was established when AVE for each construct exceeded the squared correlations between that construct and any other (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To answer RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, we conducted t-tests, considering the type of product. That is, three t-tests were conducted, one for each type of product to check whether (1) perceived congruence between the sponsor and the event, (2) attitudes toward the brand, and (3) purchase intentions varied between the actual sponsor and the strongest non-sponsor rival brand. Regarding RQ5 and RQ6, covariance-based structural equation modelling (SEM) analyses were conducted for each of the three sponsor brands and for each of the three non-sponsor rival brands.

Results

RQ1: Do people recognize local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games?

Frequencies of the answers (Table 1) show that more respondents chose the wrong brand when asked to indicate the cell phone company and yogurt brand that are the sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. However, more respondents chose the correct beer brand that sponsored the event. Table 2 shows comparisons between frequencies of answers (and percentages) based on two chi-square tests. The first one compares sponsors and non-sponsors (the sum of all three other brands). The second compares the actual sponsor with the rival brand with the largest number of picks.

In the first set of comparisons (left side of Table 2), chi-square tests were significant for the brands of cell phone providers ($\chi^2 = 45.45$, $df = 1$, $p<0.001$) and beer ($\chi^2 = 245.32$, $df = 1$, $p<0.001$), but not for the brand of yogurt ($\chi^2 = 3.86$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.055$). These results indicate that the percentage of people who correctly recognized the cell phone provider (37%) and the beer brand (54%) as the actual sponsor of the 2016 Rio Olympics was larger than that expected just by chance (25%). However, the percentage of people who correctly recognized the yogurt brand (28%) as the actual sponsor of the event was not significantly larger than that expected just by chance (25%).

In the second set of comparisons (right side of Table 2), chi-square tests were nonsignificant for cell phone provider ($\chi^2 = 0.21$, $df = 1$, $p = .643$), but they were

Table 1. **Recognition Rates of the Respondants**

Product Category	Brand	*n*	%
Cell phone	**Claro**	**228**	**36.7**
	Vivo	238	38.3
	Oi	96	15.5
	Tim	59	9.5
Yogurt	**Batavo**	**161**	**25.9**
	Nestle	317	51.0
	Danone	65	10.5
	Vigor	22	3.5
Beer	**Skol**	**293**	**47.2**
	Brahma	186	30.0
	Nova Schin	39	6.3
	Antarctica	23	3.7

Note. Brands in bold are the actual sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

Table 2. **Results of the Chi-Square Tests for Each Product Category**

	Observed N (%)	Expected N (%)	Residual			Observed N (%)	Expected N (%)	Residual
Sponsor	228	155.3	**72.8**		Claro	228	233.0	-5.0
	37%	25%				49%	50%	
Non-Sponsors	393	465.8	**-72.8**	Cell Phone	Vivo	238	233.0	5.0
	63%	75%				51%	50%	
Total	621	621				466	466	
Sponsor	161	141.3	**19.8**		Batavo	161	239.0	-78.0
	28%	25%				34%	50%	
Non-Sponsors	404	423.8	**-19.8**	Yogurt	Nestle	317	239.0	78.0
	72%	75%				66%	50%	
Total	565	565				478	478	
Sponsor	293	135.3	**157.8**		Skol	293	239.5	53.5
	54%	25%				61%	50%	
Non-Sponsor	248	405.8	**-157.8**	Beer	Brahma	186	239.5	-53.5
	46%	75%				39%	50%	
Total	541	541				479	479	

Note. Brands in bold are the actual sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

significant for yogurt ($\chi^2 = 50.91$, $df = 1$, $p<0.001$) and beer ($\chi^2 = 23.90$, $df = 1$, $p<0.001$). These results indicate that the percentage of people (49%) who recognized Claro (the cell phone provider that is a local sponsor) and the percentage of those (51%) who recognized Vivo (the rival brand) as the sponsor of the event were not significantly different from the expected just by chance (50%). Yet, the percentage of people (34%) who recognized Batavo (the yogurt brand that is a local sponsor) as the sponsor of the event and the percentage of those (66%) who believed Nestle (the rival brand) was the actual sponsor was significantly different from the expected just by chance (50%). This shows that more people incorrectly recognized Nestle as the actual sponsor of the event. Finally, the percentage of people (61%) who recognized Skol (the beer brand that is a local sponsor) as the sponsor of the event and the percentage of those (39%) who believed Brahma (the rival brand) was the actual sponsor was significantly different from the expected just by chance (50%). This shows that more people correctly recognized Skol as the actual sponsor of the event.

Assessment of the Measures

Item wordings, factor loadings (λ), average variance extracted (AVE), and internal consistencies (Cronbach's α) for sponsor brands and strongest non-sponsor rival brands are presented in Table 3. The internal consistencies indicated no concerns related to the reliability of the measures, as all values were above 0.70 for both local sponsors and the strongest non-sponsor rival brands (Nunnaly & Bernstein, 1994). The AVE values for both local sponsors and the strongest non-sponsor rival brands were all larger than 0.50 indicating good construct convergent validity.

Considering the data for local sponsors, results of the measurement model showed a reasonable fit for the three types of products: cell phone (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.057 [0.001; 0.085]; CFI = 0.994; TLI = 0.983), yogurt (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.044 [0.001; 0.100]; CFI = 0.996; TLI = 0.992), and beer (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.051 [0.009; 0.085]; CFI = 0.994; TLI = 0.990). Likewise, in the data for rival brands, results of the measurement model showed reasonable fit for the three types of products: cell phone (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.034 [0.001; 0.088]; CFI = 0.997; TLI = 0.992), yogurt (RMSEA [90% CI]= 0.044 [0.001; 0.081]; CFI = 0.995; TLI = 0.991), and beer (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.039 [0.001; 0.087]; CFI = 0.997; TLI = 0.994).

Descriptive statistics for the constructs and their correlations are reported in Table 4. Comparing different types of products, the mean scores regarding local sponsors indicate that respondents have a better perception of congruence ($M = 2.80$; $SD = 1.45$), as well as a better attitude ($M = 4.74$; $SD = 1.57$) and higher purchase intentions ($M = 3.41$; $SD = 1.45$) toward *Batavo* (the yogurt brand) when compared to *Claro* (cell phone provider) and *Skol* (beer brand). In a similar vein, *Nestle* (yogurt brand) was the non-sponsor rival brand with higher mean scores for congruence ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 1.63$), attitude ($M = 5.54$; $SD = 1.32$) and

Table 3. **Item Wording, Factor Loadings (λ), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Internal Consistency (α)**

	Cell phone (Claro)			**Yogurt (Batavo)**			**Beer (Skol)**		
Factors/Items (sponsors)	*λ*	*α*	*AVE*	*λ*	*α*	*AVE*	*λ*	*α*	*AVE*
Congruence		.79	.53		.85	.65		.86	.69
There is a logical connection between the Rio 2016 Olympics and [the chosen brand]	**.603**			**.752**			**.802**		
The image of Rio 2016 and the image of [the chosen brand] are similar	.636			.695			**.808**		
[The chosen brand] and the Rio 2016 Olympics fit together well	**.904**			**.925**			.925		
It makes sense to me that [the chosen brand] sponsors the Rio 2016 Olympics	**.722**			**.835**			**.772**		
Attitude Towards the Brand		.93	.85		**.92**	**.80**		**.94**	.84
I like the [chosen brand] brand	.900			.873			.885		
[The chosen brand] is a very good brand of [product category]	**.897**			**.899**			.917		
I have a favorable disposition toward [the chosen brand]	.961			.904			**.942**		
Purchase intentions		---	---		---	---		---	---
I would buy [product category] from [the chosen brand]	---			---			---		
	Cell phone (Vivo)			Yogurt (Nestle)			Beer (Brahma)		
Factors/Items (non-sponsors)	λ	α	AVE	λ	α	AVE	λ	α	AVE
Congruence		.72	.53		.85	.70		.89	**.71**
There is a logical connection between the Rio 2016 Olympics and [the chosen brand]	.525			.759			.868		
The image of the Rio 2016 and the image of [the chosen brand] are similar	.864			.829			.819		
[The chosen brand] and the Rio 2016 Olympics fit together well	.922			.955			.923		
It makes sense to me that [the chosen brand] sponsors Rio 2016 Olympics	.508			.778			.739		
Attitude Toward the Brand		.90	.70		.89	.54		.95	.86
I like the [chosen brand] brand	.996			.752			.923		
[The chosen brand] is a very good brand of [product category]	.718			.678			.910		
I have a favorable disposition toward [the chosen brand]	.764			.764			.944		
Purchase intentions		---	---		---	---		---	---
I would buy [product category] from [the chosen brand]	---			---			---		

Note. Model fit for sponsors: cell phone (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.057 [0.001; 0.085]; CFI = 0.994; TLI = 0.983); Yogurt (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.044 [0.001; 0.100]; CFI = 0.996; TLI = 0.992); Beer (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.051 [0.009; 0.085]; CFI = 0.994; TLI = 0.990).
Model fit for non-sponsors: cell phone (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.034 [0.001; 0.088]; CFI = 0.997; TLI = 0.992); Yogurt (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.044 [0.001; 0.081]; CFI = 0.995; TLI = 0.991); Beer (RMSEA [90% CI] = 0.039 [0.001; 0.087]; CFI = 0.997; TLI = 0.994).

Table 4. **Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) and Correlations among Constructs**

			Correlation matrix		
Sponsors	*M*	*SD*	*1*	*2*	*3*
Cell Phone (Claro)					
1. Perceived Congruence	**2.48**	**1.27**	**1.00**		
2. Attitude Towards the Brand	3.03	1.55	.47*	1.00	
3. Purchase Intentions	**2.41**	**1.40**	**.42***	**.84***	1.00
Yogurt (Batavo)					
1. Perceived Congruence	2.80	1.45	1.00		
2. Attitude Towards the Brand	4.74	1.57	.47*	1.00	
3. Purchase Intentions	**3.41**	**1.45**	**.34***	**.84***	1.00
Beer (Skol)					
1. Perceived Congruence	2.30	1.51	1.00		
2. Attitude Towards the Brand	**3.73**	**1.95**	**.46***	**1.00**	
3. Purchase Intentions	**2.71**	**1.64**	**.34***	**.83***	1.00
			Correlation matrix		
Non-sponsors	M	SD	1	2	3
Cell Phone (Vivo)					
1. Perceived Congruence	2.80	1.27	1.00		
2. Attitude Towards the Brand	4.13	1.57	.37*	1.00	
3. Purchase Intentions	3.33	1.51	.30*	.75*	1.00
Yogurt (Nestle)					
1. Perceived Congruence	3.20	1.63	1.00		
2. Attitude Towards the Brand	5.54	1.32	.36*	1.00	
3. Purchase Intentions	4.23	1.40	.33*	.83*	1.00
Beer (Brahma)					
1. Perceived Congruence	2.28	1.59	1.00		
2. Attitude Towards the Brand	3.95	1.92	.48*	1.00	
3. Purchase Intentions	2.97	1.68	.35*	.79*	1.00

Note. No correlations failed the AVE test of discriminant validity.

* $p > 0.05$.

purchase intentions ($M = 4.23$; $SD = 1.40$). In addition to that, all correlation coefficients were lower than the suggested criterion of 0.85 (Kline, 2005), and none of the squared correlations exceeded the AVE values for each associated construct. Thus, evidence of discriminant validity was supported (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

RQ2: Do people perceive a higher congruence between the local sponsor brand and the event when compared to a non-sponsor rival brand?

Results presented in Table 5 showed that respondents perceived a significantly higher congruence between the rival brand of cell phone and the event than between the actual local sponsor and the event ($t = -2.665$; $df = 436$; $p = 0.008$). The same happened with the yogurt brands ($t = -2.596$; $df = 461$; $p = 0.010$). However, perceptions of congruence for the local sponsor of beer-event and rival brand of beer-event did not differ significantly ($t = 0.183$; $df = 477$; $p = 0.855$). Overall, the respondents did not perceive a stronger congruence of the local sponsor brand and the event when compared to that of the rival brand and the event.

RQ3: Do people have better attitudes toward the local sponsor brand of the event when compared to a non-sponsor rival brand?

Results presented in Table 5 also showed that respondents had better attitudes toward the rival brands of cell phones ($t = -7.369$; $df = 436$; $p < 0.001$) and yogurt ($t = -5.781$; $df = 461$; $p < 0.001$) when compared to the actual local sponsor's brand. Attitudes toward

Table 5. **Results of the *t*-Tests for Each Type of Product Regarding Perceived Fit, Attitude towards the Brand, and Purchase Intentions**

		M	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*
Cell phone	*Perceived Congruence*			*-2.665*	*436*	*.008*
	Sponsor	2.48	1.27			
	Non-sponsor	**2.80**	**1.27**			
	Attitude Towards the Brand			-7.369	**436**	**.000**
	Sponsor	**3.03**	**1.55**			
	Non-sponsor	**4.13**	**1.57**			
	Purchase Intentions			-7.229	**436**	**.000**
	Sponsor	2.41	1.40			
	Non-sponsor	**3.33**	**1.51**			
Yogurt	*Perceived Congruence*			-2.596	**461**	**.010**
	Sponsor	2.80	1.45			
	Non-sponsor	**3.20**	**1.63**			
	Attitude Towards the Brand			**-5.781**	461	.000
	Sponsor	4.74	1.57			
	Non-sponsor	5.54	1.32			
	Purchase Intentions			-9.014	461	.000
	Sponsor	3.41	1.45			
	Non-sponsor	4.23	1.40			
Beer	*Perceived Congruence*			.183	477	.855
	Sponsor	2.30	1.51			
	Non-sponsor	2.28	1.59			
	Attitude Toward the Brand			-1.161	477	.246
	Sponsor	3.73	1.95			
	Non-sponsor	3.95	1.92			
	Purchase Intentions			-2.032	477	.022
	Sponsor	2.71	1.64			
	Non-sponsor	2.97	1.68			

the beer brands did not differ significantly between local sponsor and non-sponsors (t = -1.161; df = 477; p = 0.246). Overall, respondents did not have better attitudes toward the actual local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games when compared to the rival sponsors' brands.

RQ4: Do people have higher purchase intentions of the local sponsor brand of the event when compared to a non-sponsor rival brand?

Regarding purchase intentions (Table 5), results show that respondents expressed significantly higher intentions to purchase products of the rival brands than the products of actual local sponsors, with this happening for all types of products: cell phones (t = -7.229; df = 436; p<0.001), yogurt (t = -9.014; df = 461; p<0.001), and beer (t = -2.302; df = 477; p = 0.022).

RQ5: Do people's perceptions of brand-event congruence and attitudes toward the brand influence their purchase intentions of local sponsor brands?

The results of the covariance-based SEM indicated that the structural model fits data reasonably well for all three sponsor brands: cell phone provider (χ^2/df = 2.39; RMSEA = 0.079; CFI = 0.985; TLI = 0.968), yogurt (χ^2/df = 1.97; RMSEA = 0.078; CFI = 0.986; TLI = 0.973), and beer (χ^2/df = 2.35; RMSEA = 0.068; CFI = 0.989; TLI = 0.981). Figure 1 (top chart) shows that the same pattern occurred for path coefficients in all three models (one for each type of product). The path coefficient from perceived congruence to attitudes toward the brand was larger and significant for all three local sponsors (cell phone: $\beta = 0.547$, $p < 0.001$; yogurt: $\beta = 0.508$, $p < 0.001$; beer: $\beta = 0.461$, $p < 0.001$). The same happened for the path coefficient from attitudes

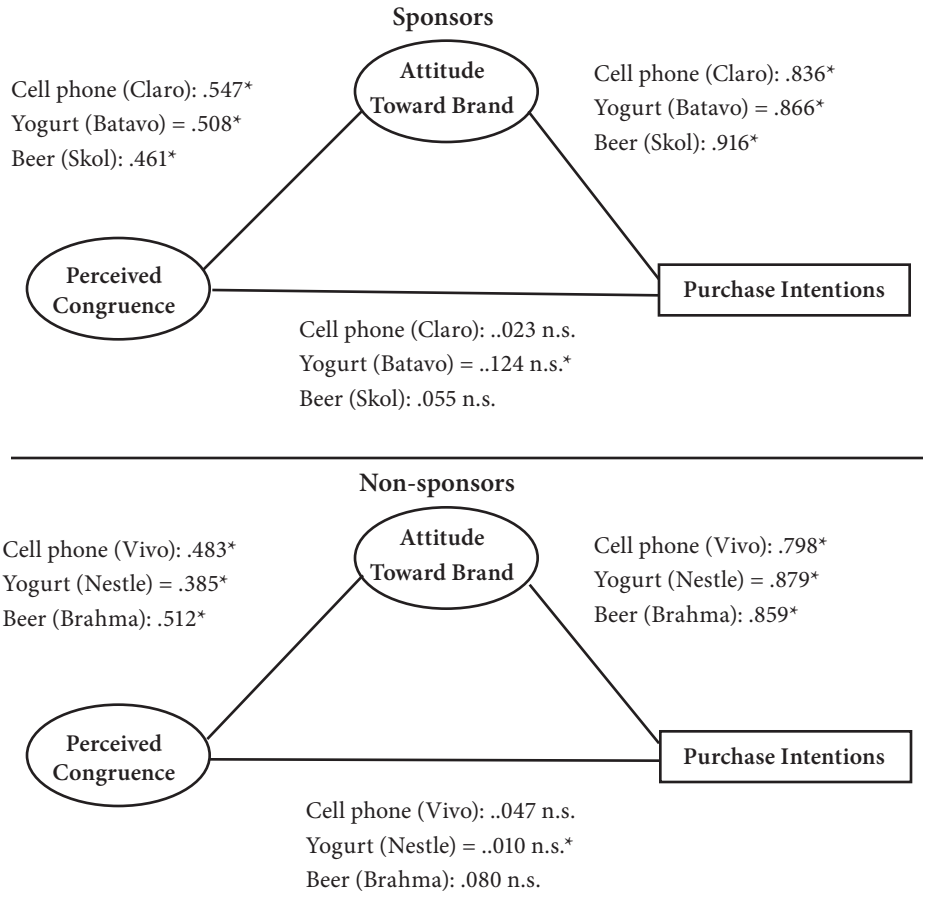

Figure 1. **Standardized estimates of the structural models**
Notes. * p < 0.001; n.s. = Not Significant.

to purchase intentions (cell phone: β = 0.836, p < 0.001; yogurt: β = 0.866, p < 0.001; beer: β = 0.916, p < 0.001). However, the path coefficient from perceived congruence to purchase intentions was nonsignificant for all three local sponsors (p > 0.05).

RQ6: Do people's perceptions of brand-event congruence and attitudes toward the brand influence their purchase intentions of non-sponsor rival brands?

Like the results for the sponsors, the covariance-based SEM indicated that the structural model fits data reasonably well for all three non-sponsor brands: cell phone provider (χ^2/df = 2.50; RMSEA = 0.080; CFI = 0.977; TLI = 0.951), yogurt (χ^2/df = 2.74; RMSEA = 0.076; CFI = 0.984; TLI = 0.971), and beer (χ^2/df = 1.55; RMSEA = 0.055; CFI = 0.993; TLI = 0.988). Figure 1 (bottom chart) refers to data of non-sponsors and shows a similar pattern as that in the models for local sponsors. That is, the path coefficients from perceived congruence to attitudes toward the brand (cell phone: β = 0.483, p < 0.001; yogurt: β = 0.385, p < 0.001; beer: β = 0.512, p < 0.001), and from attitudes to purchase intentions (cell phone: β = 0.798, p < 0.001; yogurt: β = 0.879, p < 0.001; beer: β = 0.859, p < 0.001) were large and significant for all three non-sponsor brands, while the path coefficient from perceived congruence to purchase intentions was nonsignificant for all three non-sponsor brands (p > .05).

Discussion

The purposes of this study were (1) to describe the awareness, congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and their rival brands, and (2) to test the relationships between congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of both local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and their rival brands. Six distinct research questions were tested. Since no empirical research has been done on local sponsors of the Olympic Games (i.e., brands with less prominence and partnerships with different timing, intensity, and strength as compared to global sponsors), this study contributes to the sport sponsorship literature by exploring the effectiveness of local sponsors and their rival brands,

and by examining how perceptions of congruence and attitudes towards the brand influence purchase intentions of products from both local sponsors and non-sponsor rival brands.

The analysis of recognition rates indicated that in the lead up to the Olympic Games, only the beer sponsor (*Skol*) was correctly recognized as a sponsor of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, by a significantly higher number of respondents. The recognition rates for the cell phone sponsor (*Claro*) did not differ from the strongest non-sponsor rival brand (*Vivo*), while the yogurt non-sponsor rival brand (*Nestle*) was incorrectly recognized as a sponsor by a significantly higher number of participants than the actual yogurt sponsor (*Batavo*). These findings may call into question the role of the Local Sponsorship Program of the Olympic Games (IOC, 2016a) and highlight the idea that the ability to identify a sponsor can be subject to distortion when people are exposed to multiple brands (Cornwell et al., 2006; McAlister, Kelly, Humphreys, & Cornwell, 2012). The prominence of a brand (e.g., market share and share of voice) has been suggested to be an important source of information when consumers infer the identity of event sponsors (Wakefield, Becker-Olsen, & Cornwell, 2007; Wakefield & Bennett, 2010). For example, Pham and Johar (2001) found that a prominent brand such as Nike is more likely to be identified as an event sponsor than a brand with less market prominence such as Converse. In the context of the current study, *Nestle* is one of the strongest brands worldwide in the food industry and deeply rooted in Brazilian culture (Statista, 2016). It means that the brand may be more accessible in memory and perceived by people as a more plausible sponsor of the event due to resource availability (Pham & Johar, 2001; Wakefield et al., 2007). With this idea in mind, OCOGs should develop programs for sponsor recognition and public relations to help distinguishing local sponsors from other brands within the event environment (MacInstosh et al., 2012). At the same time, it is critical for local sponsors (particularly those with low recognition rates such as *Claro* and *Batavo*) to highlight their links with the sponsored event in all marketing communications and invest in leveraging their sponsorship deals (McAlister et al., 2012). Leveraging is likely to contribute to increased brand awareness and to help avoid accidental ambush marketing (Nickell, Cornwell, & Johnston, 2011).

The participants' perceptions of congruence brand-event and attitude towards the brand did not differ between the local sponsor and non-sponsor brands of beer, and were significantly lower for the cell phone provider and yogurt local sponsors than for their strongest rival brands. Also, purchase intentions were significantly lower for the three local sponsors when compared to their respective non-sponsor rival brands. These findings do not seem to align with the idea that sponsorship of sport mega-events is an important strategy for obtaining competitive advantages (e.g., Chanavat, Martinent, & Ferrand, 2010) and that nationality may act as a legitimate dimension of congruence (Groza, Cobbs, & Schaefers, 2012). It is important to understand the sponsorship setting though. As mentioned earlier, the market prominence of some rival brands may have contributed to a certain extent to these results. In addition, these results may be related to the fact that partnerships between local sponsors and the Olympics are confined to a limited period of time due the transient nature of the event (Nadeau et al., 2016), and rival brands examined in the current study have a strong presence in the Brazilian sport setting. For example, Brahma (non-sponsor rival brand of beer) has been promoting its link with football (i.e., the main sport in the country) over the last years and is currently one of the official sponsors of the Brazilian national football team (Exame, 2012). It means that the constant exposure of rival brands in sport settings may confuse respondents, leading them to believe that these brands may have a connection with other sport-related events. As noted by Pitt et al. (2010), despite the efforts of event organizers and host governments to protect sponsors, some reaction from rival brands is inevitable. Ambush marketing, either intentional or incidental, is likely to feature at any sport mega-event (Dickson, Naylor, & Phelps, 2015) compromising the effectiveness of sponsorship deals (Forbes, 2016). In this sense, local sponsors should invest greatly in leveraging activities (e.g., experiential activities, public relations activities, internet tie-ins, direct marketing, sales promotions or exclusive products designed to celebrate the event) to succeed in differentiation from competitors and to trigger more positive reactions among target consumers (Fetchko, Roy, & Clow, 2013; Nickell et al. 2011), while OCOGs should actively invest on restricting access to competitor brands (O'Reilly & Huybers, 2015) and facilitate communication platforms to promote the association between local sponsors and the Olympic Games.

Another potential explanation for these findings is related to the conflicting environment surrounding the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. The event was heavily criticized due to the associated costs and lack of investments in areas deemed deprived by Brazilian citizens (Independent, 2016), such as public safety, education, and health assistance. This may lead respondents to view the local brands that are sponsoring the

event in a more negative way as opposed to the other brands with no official linkages. In addition, the level of interest in the Olympic Games has been suggested to influence people's reactions to sponsors (MacIntosh et al., 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2008). Thus, although regional proximity sponsor-sport property has been suggested to benefit consumer responses to sponsors (Woisetschläger et al., 2017), the examination of target consumers' opinions about hosting sport mega-events may represent an important step in future research aiming to better understand prospect consumers' reactions to local sponsors or even the appropriateness of sponsorship investments by local brands.

When examining the structural relationships between congruence, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intentions, findings revealed that perceived congruence is a significant predictor of attitude toward the brand, but has no direct impact on purchase intentions, with this being evident for all local sponsors and non-sponsors. In turn, attitude toward the brand had a strong impact on purchase intentions for all six brands under examination (3 local sponsors and 3 non-sponsors). These findings suggest that congruence with sport mega-events is not enough to drive consumer intentions to purchase local sponsors' products. Nevertheless, findings in the current research reinforce the role of leveraging activities and support prior studies suggesting that a background of sympathy toward the brand is crucial to generate competitive advantages (e.g., Biscaia et al., 2013; Biscaia et al., 2017; Nadeau et al., 2016). That is, even though perceived congruence is not directly related to purchase intentions, local sponsors should actively work to create a strategic match with the sponsored event as it will positively influence an individual's willingness to purchase products via increased attitude toward the brand.

Previous studies suggest that a consumer's perception of sponsor credibility and commitment to the sport property are important for triggering positive responses (Rifon et al., 2004). In this sense, both local sponsors and OCOGs should make clear to their target audience the role of local partnerships to the event's success. For example, the use of trustworthy personalities from local communities to help promote the sponsorship deal may prove to be important for increasing individuals' attitudes towards the local sponsor and subsequent intentions to purchase associated products, and this could be done using both offline and online communication channels (Delia & Armstrong, 2015; Fetchko et al., 2013). In a similar vein, the integration of the national team's assets (e.g., athletes or coaches) into marketing campaigns may help local sponsors' prominence and appeal for consumers (Armenakyan et al., 2016; MacInstosh et al., 2012). Moreover, the OCOGs and other interested parties (i.e., host governments) should work together not only to show who the local sponsors are, but to also prevent other brands from obtaining undue benefits by misappropriating the event image. Examples may include the policing of ambush marketing activities through human resources or technologies and exclusivity contracts for local sponsors (O'Reilly & Huybers, 2015). This could also be achieved through strategies such as pre-event education and public relations initiatives, establishment of 'clean zones', use of specific contractual language (Cornwell, 2014), and event-specific trademark protection legislation (Dickson et al., 2015).

Given the appeal of the Olympic Games for numerous brands, understanding consumer reactions to local sponsors represents an important step towards breaking the clutter. The results seem to suggest that local sponsors are not obtaining the benefits often attributed to global sponsors, which may indicate the need for OCOGs to reevaluate the Local Sponsorship Program. Nevertheless, caution should be taken when considering the results. That is, even though consumers can infer about brands based on several environment cues (Baker et al., 2002), participants' reactions toward local sponsors were collected before the event had started and people tend to draw more inferences about sponsors as the Olympic Games unfold (Nadeau et. al., 2016).

Limitation and Future Research

As with any study, there are limitations that should be considered in future research endeavors. First, participants' opinions about Rio de Janeiro hosting the Olympic Games were not controlled. Brazil invested greatly into providing good infrastructure and resources to stage the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. However, the event was subject to criticism from a large portion of the Brazilian population (The New York Times, 2016). Future studies should collect data on consumers' opinions about hosting these sport mega-events as this may represent an important aspect to further understand their reaction to local brands associated to the event. This could be of particular importance for countries facing social and economic difficulties that are engaged in mega event organizations or intending to bid for hosting future sport mega-events.

Second, data were collected prior to the event had started and the sample may not be representative of all consumer types of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Previous studies have suggested that socio-demographic characteristics tend to influence perceptions of major

sport events (Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009). In addition, Armenakyan et al. (2016) noted that the intense emotional experience felt by consumers throughout the competitions may lead to variations in sponsors' evaluation. As such, additional studies should try to collect data longitudinally (before, during, and after the event) and with consumers with different social and economic backgrounds. This could be done by using different data collection procedures (e.g., paper-and-pencil and online surveys, interviews), thus contributing to a better understanding of variations in awareness, congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions of both local sponsor and non-sponsor products.

Third, while the variables measured in the current study find large theoretical support in prior sponsorship literature, future research could include additional concepts to extend our understanding of sponsorship effectiveness for local sponsors of sport mega-events. The inclusion of additional factors such as sponsorship leverage (Kim et al., 2015) or brand familiarity (Campbell & Keller, 2003) may contribute to improving the ability of the model in explaining purchase intentions. As sponsorship in sports continues to grow (IEG, 2017), a comprehensive model of purchase intentions through a longitudinal approach would be of great value for both OCOGs and local sponsors (O'Reilly et al., 2008). In addition, the examination of the link between purchase intentions and actual purchase behaviors would be important to take into account in future studies, given that this is paramount to understanding sponsorship effectiveness in sport mega-events and recent studies have suggested further attention be given to this topic (e.g., Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015; Zaharia et al., 2016). An additional suggestion for future studies seeking to better understand how local sponsors and host entities could improve the effectiveness of their sponsorship deals might be the comparison of the proposed relationships among local sponsors of different sport mega-events (e.g., FIFA World Cup vs. Olympic Games).

Conclusion

In summary, the current study was driven by important research questions including how awareness, congruence, attitudes, and purchase intentions vary for both local sponsors of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games and non-sponsor rival brands, and the examination of the relationships between these variables. The findings indicated that awareness, congruence, attitudes and purchase intentions were not ranked higher for local sponsors when compared to their rival brands with no direct link to the event, and that perceptions of congruence and attitude toward the brand are important aspects for understanding purchase intentions for both local sponsors and non-sponsors. Examining how target consumers react to both local sponsors and rival brands is important to understanding how to potentiate the relationship between sponsor and sponsee, and this study represents an initial effort to provide OCOGs and local sponsors with a basis of information to enhance their partnerships.

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